Concerning Germanic Straw Bears, St. Nicholas & the Last Sheaf

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> Hidden away inside every word is the landscape on which it has lived and moved […]. In the process the word does not forget where it has been and can never wholly free itself from the dominion of the contexts of which it has been part" (Bakhtin 1973: 167). The trick is finding the opening, the aperture, the angle from which to view this inside, this inner landscape. So how do we get a compound expression like 'Straw Bear' to speak and begin to tell us her stories?

1.0 Introduction

When analyzing the traditional ritual activities connected to European Good-Luck Visits we find that the actors utilize different types of plant-based materials to make their costumes. Symbolically, these objects form part of a larger class of objects and actions whose purpose is to ensure the health and well-being of those whose households are visited as well as to contribute to the fecundity and health of their domestic animals. As we shall see, the integration of natural plant-based materials in such traditional performances is not limited to the employment of these items as props with symbolic value. Rather vegetation, specifically, various types of straw (wheat, rye,

oats, spelt or pea-straw) have been used, quite literally, to construct the very costumes worn by a specific class of bear performers, known collectively as *Strohbären*, that is *straw bears.* Whereas utilization of straw in the confection of these costumes is commonly associated with the bear actors of Bavaria, similar costumes are found in other parts of Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland. In those cases, the straw, whether intricately woven and plaited or loosely gathered around the body of the actor, is the exposed. It is the visible outer 'coat' of the performer.

In many other European locations, although the body of the actor is encased in straw, the outer layer is made of heavy burlap, all of which gives the actor a bulked-up appearance. Although the exact purpose of using straw to pad the costume the actor is not totally clear, there is reason to believe that in times past the actor was led through the streets where, acting as a "scape-bear" he received blows from those in attendance and was said to carry away negative influences from the village. There is a substantial amount of ethnographic evidence in support of this interpretation. Nevertheless, further research needs to be carried out on this topic (Frank, in prep.-b).

We should note that in addition to straw, many other types of plant material have been used to construct the costumes, for example, moss, leaves, twigs, and pine boughs. And, less exotically, the bear costume can consist of a real bear skin and the head of a real bear, as is the case of locations in Rumania (Akbar, 2015). As noted elsewhere, the actors, often called 'men of the forest'—as were bears themselves—were frequently identified as 'wild-men' (*cf.* Bartra, 1994; Giroux, 1984; Truffaut, 1988, 2010; Urbeltz, 1994). A remarkable collection of photographs of these European 'wild-men,' put together by the French photographer Charles Fréger and taken in 2010-2011, is available online at: http://www.charlesfreger.com/portfolio/wilder-mann/. The collection reflects the wide variation in the costumes as well as the variety of plant materials, animal furs and horns that have been utilized to create them.

2.0 On the uses of charcoal, chunks of coal and ashes

In contemporary European versions of the Good Luck Visit performances, in many locations it is the Christian bishop Saint Nicholas who enters the dwelling first, followed by a more menacing masked companion, often wearing a costume made of furs. Saint Nicholas interrogates the children and in the case of a good report, distributes gifts. Meanwhile his darker counterpart stands at the door, poised, if need be, to administer punishment, lashes, leaving whips, rods or chunks of coal behind for the misbehaving children.

Fig. 1. Painting by Franz Xaver von Paumgartten: Christmas Eve and St. Nicholas with the Krampus. Vienna 1820. (Museen der Stadt Wien). Reproduced in Weber–Kellermann (1978: 26).

Whereas today this division of duties appears to be logical, namely, that good children are rewarded with gifts while bad children are punished, and that these tasks should be assigned to two different performers, there are reasons to believe that previously, there was only one actor involved and that the items understood today as signifying punishments were welcomed by adults and children, alike, as life-giving actions, including striking the 'victim' with some sort of whip and smearing the face of the 'victim' with greasy mixture of ashes and lard.

In other words, while at first glance a gift of black charcoal appears to carry a purely negative connotation, Miles (1912: 251–260) has demonstrated that charcoal was originally viewed in a positive light. Specifically, pieces of charcoal from the Yule Log were highly valued for their prophylactic characteristics as were the log's ashes which were carefully collected and utilized for a variety of healing purposes.[1] Moreover, it has been argued that the ethical distinction between good children and bad children along with the consequent distribution of gifts or blows, "is of comparatively recent origin, an invention perhaps for children when the customs came to be performed solely for their benefit, and that the beatings and gifts were originally shared by all alike and were of a sacramental character" (Miles, 1912: 207).

Whether Miles was correct in alleging that there were never any threats or real punishments doled out by the visitor to misbehaving children or adults is a matter still under investigation. There

[1] In zones where only one character clad in skins or straw examines children, distributing blows and gifts alike, *e.g.*, in the case of the *Christpuppe* or *Knecht Ruprecht*, ashes play a major role. For example, in Mechlenburg where he is called *rû Klas* ("rough Nicholas"), he sometimes wears bells and carries a staff with a bag of ashes at the end. Hence the name *Aschenklas* is occasionally given to him. One theory connects this aspect of him with the *Polaznik* "first footer" visitor of the Slavs. On Christmas Day in Crivoscian farms he goes to the hearth, takes up the ashes of the Yule log and dashes them against the cauldron-hook above so that sparks fly (Miles 1912: 231, 252). For other cases of the European belief in the "good luck" conferred by ashes, blackening one's face with them and black creatures in general, *cf.* Alford, 1930: 277 ff.; Barandiaran, 1974, II, 375; Creighton, 1950: 20–21; Frank, 2005.

is some indication that much earlier the role played by the enforcer was not only recognized by the collective, but also encouraged and authorized by it. Today these acts of rewarding or punishing the conduct to those visited are carried out by figures lacking any official status to do so. However, there are clues which suggest that earlier things might have been different. Today these interrogations are viewed as a quaint custom geared to children while no real authority is vested in characters carrying out the visitations. However, in times past this tradition might well have ensured that members of the collective, not just children, behaved properly and if they didn't there was an enforcer who in an official capacity exercised his or her oversight (Frank, in prep.-a).

In what appears to be the most recent iteration of the Good Luck Visits, such as those of the secular Santa Claus, the entire affair is directed at children and they fully expect to receive gifts from the character who visits their home on Christmas Eve. This modification is further evidence of the structural changes that have taken place over the years. In many parts of Europe, it is still a troupe of young adults along with their bear performer (or bear performers) who visit the households and expect, in return for their services, to receive, not give, treats consisting of food and drink (Alford, 1928, 1930, 1931; 1937; Praneuf, 1989).

In Europe the ritual cleansings that formed part of these Good Luck Visits included fumigations, incensing by smoke, and flailing the person with aromatic branches. Such ceremonies recall similar healing techniques involving smudging with the sacred smoke of juniper branches, still performed today by Native American medicine men and women (Brunton, 1993: 138). Hence, from a diachronic point of view the European whipping customs are perhaps better understood not as "punishments, but kindly services; their purpose is to drive away evil influences, and to bring to the flogged one the life-giving virtues of the tree from which the twigs or boughs are taken" (Miles 1912: 207).

Indeed, wands were often constructed for this purpose from a birch-bough with all the leaves and twigs stripped off, except at the top, to which oak-leaves and twigs of juniper pine were attached along with their bright red berries. Devoid of decoration, these rods or switches became broom-like devices that were used to sweep away unhealthy influences. Pig bladders attached to poles were also used in such prophylactic flagellations. In short, blows delivered by the switches and bladders were believed to ensure good health, promote fertility in animals and humans alike as well as the fruitfulness of crops: they were intended to bring about prosperity in general. Miles suggests a connection between the different parts of the healing wand: "Or possibly the rod and the fruit may once have been conjoined, the beating being performed with fruit-laden boughs in order to produce prosperity. It is noteworthy that at Etzendorf so many head of cattle and loads of hay are augured for the farmer as there are juniper-berries and twigs on St. Martin's gerte" (Miles, 1912: 207).

3.0 Introducing the Germanic Straw Bear

When attempting to make sense of these rituals and public performances, it is important to keep in mind the strong possibility that they are survivals emanating from a much earlier archaic

cosmology, one that held humans descended from bears (Frank, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2015; Peillen, 1986). According to this view, initially such performances were enmeshed in an animistic *Weltanschauung* that antedates the arrival of agro-pastoral frames of belief. If one considers this ursine genealogy, associated beliefs, and rituals in the *longue durée*, the question that arises is how the figure of a bear came to be integrated into an agricultural mode of subsistence and the worldview associated with it. When we begin to analyze how these older rituals might have been reinterpreted, we need to recall that the bear as well as the Good Luck Visits are, still today, understood to ensure the health and well-being of those visited and, by extension, to guarantee that the animals and fields of the households visited also would prosper.

In this way the visits have been linked to notions of fecundity and regeneration. In much earlier times carrying them out each year would have guaranteed that an abundance of game and other food resources would be available to the hunter-gatherers who were performing the appropriate ceremonies, showing respect and venerating the bear and therefore treating all of nature properly. Hence, we could view the bear as incarnating in some fashion the spirit of vegetation in addition to being viewed as an ancestor or even progenitor of human beings, conceptual frames of reference typical of the practices of bear ceremonialism documented among circumboreal hunter-gatherers (Hallowell, 1926).

In fact, evidence from hunter-gatherers in North America and Eurasia where bear ceremonialism was or still is practiced indicates that the bear was often conceptualized as the 'Master of Game', a kind of omnipotent guardian watching over all of nature. Assigning this function to the bear seems to correspond to the wide-spread belief, well attested among northern hunter-gatherer peoples, that the animal acts as a supernatural master or guardian spirit, caring for all species of animals as well as the rest of the natural world. As has been noted, this is a common belief encountered among many native peoples in the northern hemisphere where evidence of bear ceremonialism exists (Brightman, 2002; Hallowell, 1926; Sarmela, 2006). With the introduction of agriculture, animal husbandry and cereal production, it is logical that the beliefs and rituals that would be adapted, modified and reshaped so that they could be incorporated into the new mode of subsistence (Ingold, 1995, 2006; Shepard, 1992, 1999, 2007).

In this respect, the following commentary by Praneuf (1989: 63-64) is noteworthy. In it he provides additional information on St. Martin's gerte but at the same time offers a concrete example of the re-appropriation of the old practice of the Good Luck Visits in which the human dresses up as a bear. In addition, we often see the enactment of a ritual marriage of the 'bear' to a human female (Alford, 1930; Sarmela, 2006). Before examining Praneuf's comments, we need to turn our attention first to what is now a relatively outdated practice, the way that sheaves were stacked in Austria prior to the introduction of mechanized harvesting techniques. As Werner Baiker, coordinator of the Strohbären Museum in Germany, explained, this method of shocking wheat is only done today by those who prefer to preserve the traditional harvesting customs.

In the photograph below (*Fig. 2*), the resemblance between the shape of the shocks of wheat and the shape of German *Strohbären* (straw bears) is quite striking.[2] Naturally, there are many

[2] A sampling of the remarkable variety in the costumes of straw bears can be found at the following links:

different ways of shocking wheat. But the shape of many of the shocks do have a striking resemblance to these straw bears even though the latter creatures come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some of this variety has to do with the type of straw utilized in the construction of their 5costumes, for instance, wheat, rye or pea-straw (*cf. Fig. 3, 4, 5 & 6)*.

Fig. 2. Photograph taken in Austria showing the way that sheaves used to be stacked. Source: https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.495744633866076.1073741828.480301872077019&type=3.

The festival, as described by Praneuf (1989: 63–64), incorporates the figure of a straw bear whose costume is made from the straw in the last shock harvested. Undoubtedly, the utilization of straw from the harvest had a special significance. However, to assume, as Praneuf seems to do, that the last sheaf, left standing or carefully preserved in the barn, was itself "the last refuge of the spirit of vegetation" strikes me as mistaken. That interpretation positions the sheaf as the main focus rather than the figure of the straw bear made from that plant material. This emphasis on the part of Praneuf on the plant itself seems to reflect the popular Frazerian concept of a nature deity, a kind of vegetation deity often associated with fertility whose disappearance and reappearance, life, death and rebirth. According to Frazer, the deity is said to embody the growth cycle of plants (Frazer, 1922 [1912-1930]).

In contrast, once our attention shifts to the way that this plant material was traditionally incorporated into the costume of the straw bears, the symbolism becomes more complex and suggests a re-inscription of beliefs and rituals originally associated with the ursine genealogy discussed previously.

> Almost throughout Europe, there is a ritual of the last sheaf, left standing or carefully preserved in the barn, for, in the mowed field this [sheaf] is the last refuge of the spirit of vegetation. In Germany, the reaper to whom falls the harvesting of the last sprigs (or finishing the threshing) dresses up in straw and places himself in the

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http://www.strohbären.de/; http://www.strawbear.org.uk/history-whittlesea-straw-bear-festival.html ; https://www.pinterest.com/monarose9212/strawboys-green-men-and-osses/ and http://www.charlesfreger.com/portfolio/wilder-mann/ .

> last wagon of wheat, sometimes with a 'bear mate' [female] or a couple of 'betrothed of wheat' (the equivalent of 'the rose tree [male] and rose tree [female]'); this is the festival of the closure of the harvests. Often the young women dance with the last sheaf, called 'the bear', who they embrace as if he were a man. (Praneuf, 1989: 63-64).[3]

From the above description it appears that Praneuf was not familiar with the straw bear traditions of the zone. Clearly, given that the straw of the last sheaf is used to construct the costume ("s'habille de paille"), it is not so much that the women danced with the last sheaf called 'l'ours' but rather with a straw bear. Hence, while there is no question that the last sheaf was important, the following sentence is somewhat misleading: "Parfois, les filles dansaient avec la dernière gerbe, appelée 'l'ours qu'elles enlaçaient comme un cavalier."

In summary, it seems that in Germany the last shock of wheat straw was set aside for a particular purpose: for constructing the costume of the individual who would play the role of the straw bear in the harvest festival that ensued once the fieldwork was finished. What is particularly intriguing is not just seeing the all the women taking turns dancing with the straw bear, but the fact that there might have been two straw bears, that is, a couple. One of the women has a 'bear mate' and appears also to have been dressed in straw. Taken together, the event gives the appearance of a prenuptial ceremony. This is reminiscent of the 'bear marriages' well-documented in Scandinavia.

In other locations, beliefs concerning the last sheaf are varied, often relating to agricultural deities such as Demeter as well as other more local traditions that linked the spirit of vegetation and fecundity to various animals (Mannhardt, 1865, 1868, 1897-1876). At present, Germanic-speaking lands appear to be the only place where the pre-agricultural belief system associated with the ursine genealogy—one that harkens back to a hunter-gatherer mentality—has been documented in relation to the last sheaf. However, further research could reveal addition locations where the practice has survived.

In short, the Germanic straw bear custom stands out against the customs recorded—at least until now—in the rest of Europe.

> Even today, in Bulgaria, a doll is made with the last sheaf, dressed in women's clothes and called the Queen of Wheat; it is taken to the village, set on the fire and the ashes are spread on the fields. Here we find the almost irresistible tendency to give to the fetish, that is to say, to the object that is believed to be animated by a spirit, the physiognomy that one attributes to this spirit itself. Almost everywhere we meet the belief in the magical virtues of the last sheaf, we find this object covered with feminine ornaments: in Germany, in Russia, in France, in Scandinavia, in England [...]. Almost everywhere too, we see that this figurine is sacrificed to allow its soul to pass into the next harvest. In Silesia, the peasants fought over the calcinated shreds, and when they did not bury them in the fields, they hung them on the trees of their gardens. Sometimes the foregoing is more

[3] Unless otherwise indicated all translations have been done by the author. French original is: "Presque partout en Europe, il y a un rituel de la dernière gerbe, laissée sur pied ou soigneusement conservée dans la grange, car, dans le champ fauché, elle est le dernier refuge de l'esprit de la végétation. En Allemagne, le moissonneur à qui il échoit de faucher les derniers épis (ou de terminer le battage) s'habille de paille et prend place sur la dernière charrette de blé, parfois avec une 'compagne-ourse' ou un couple de 'fiancés des blés' (un équivalent 'du rosier et de la rosière'); il est à la fête de clôture des moissons. Parfois, les filles dansaient avec la dernière gerbe, appelée 'l'ours', qu'elles enlaçaient comme un cavalier" (Praneuf, 1989: 63-64).

> anthropomorphic still: in Upper Brittany the last sheaf, shaped like a doll and nicknamed "Mother-sheaf"; sometimes receives, inside, a second figurine, smaller, which obviously represents the child in the breast of its mother—Demeter pregnant with Koré.
>
> However, it is also possible that from the last sheaf still standing, its spirit has invaded the body of an animal or even a human being. […] as we have seen the sheaf treated, sometimes [it was] the harvester or the reaper who gave the last blow, sometimes a stranger passing at this moment through the neighborhood, sometimes a creature, domestic or savage, who was near or brought in for that purpose, especially if it is an animal belonging to the species which lent its features to the spirit of the harvest. (D'Alviella, 1902: 183-184).[4]

Although further research needs to be done on this topic, the Germanic custom discussed by Praneuf would seem to harken back to an earlier mindset in which ritual performances involving bears—in this case straw bears—were believed to insure the fecundity of nature and consequently the well-being and health of humankind.

4.0 Problems involved with sourcing pea-straw

In Germanic-speaking countries, with the advent of modern mechanized farming, the nature of cover crops being planted also changed. After World War II this resulted, for example, in a shortage of the type of pea-straw which was the traditional element used in constructing the costumes of the straw bears of the zone. Farmers began planting a type of pea-straw that was much shorter in length and more suitable to mechanical harvesting techniques. Although the disappearance of long stem pea-straw, that is, straw of the appropriate length, nearly brought about the demise of the straw bears, the tradition was saved by groups who began planting pea-straw of the right length, specifically for the purpose of providing the basic material needed for these costumes. A similar situation arose in the case of new shorter varieties of oats and wheat whose popularity resulted in a shortage of the proper kind of long-stemmed straw required for the intricate construction of straw bear costumes. But once again, enterprising groups of straw bear devotees

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[4] "Aujourd'hui encore, en Bulgarie, on fabrique avec la dernière gerbe une poupée qu'on revêt de vêtements féminins et qu'on appelle la Reine du Blé ; on la promène dans le village, on la livre au feu et on répand les cendres dans les champs. Nous retrouvons ici la tendance presque irrésistible à donner au fétiche, c'est à-dire à l'objet qu'on croit anime par un esprit, la physionomie qu'on prête à cet esprit lui-même. Presque partout où nous rencontrons la croyance aux vertus magiques de la dernière gerbe, nous trouvons celle-ci revêtue de parures féminines : en Allemagne, en Russie, en France, en Scandinavie, en Angleterre […]. Presque partout aussi, nous voyons qu'on sacrifie cette figurine pour permettre à son âme de passer dans la récolte prochaine. Dans la Silésie, les paysans s'en disputent les lambeaux calcines et, quand ils ne les enterrent pas dans les champs, ils les suspendent aux arbres de leurs jardins. Parfois le précède est plus anthropomorphique encore : dans la Haute-Bretagne la dernière gerbe, façonnée en poupée el surnommée la « Mère-gerbe » ; reçoit parfois, à l'intérieur, une seconde figurine, plus petite, qui représente évidemment l'enfant dans le sein de sa mère –Déméter enceinte de Coré.

Cependant il se peut aussi que, de la dernière gerbe encore debout, l'esprit ait envahi le corps d'un animal ou même d'une personne humaine. […] comme nous venons de voir qu'on traitait la gerbe, tantôt le moissonneur ou la moissonneuse qui auront donné le dernier coup de faulx, tantôt un étranger qui passait en ce moment dans le voisinage, tantôt une créature, domestique ou sauvage, qui se trouvait aux abords ou qu'on avait amenée dans ce but, surtout s'il s'agit d'un animal appartenant à l'espèce qui a prêté ses traits à l'esprit de la moisson." (D'Alviella, 1902: 183-184)

came to the rescue. They were able to get access to fields and plant the correct variety so that the long stem variety of straw is available once more.

Fig. 3. Gathering pea-straw in southern Germany in the region of Empfingen.

Fig. 4. Der Äschadreppler und die Strohbären in Hirschau in the region of Bavaria, Germany. Source: https://www.nzh.de/joo/index.php/fasnetsfiguren/aeschadreppler.

In Tubingen, *der Strohbär* is called *der Äschadreppler*, an expression that is the Tubingen dialectal version of *Erbsen-trappler*, that is 'pea(straw)-trotter' or 'dribbler'. It is a straw man with a coat made of the straw from the (animal fodder) pea plant. Hence, for the long-term survival of the straw bears in the municipality of Hirschau in southern Germany, the availability of this type of pea-straw was fundamental.

> It is known from tradition that in earlier times the Äschadreppler and the straw bear played a prominent role in Hirschau. Today this original form is found only very sporadically in the Swabian-Alemannic carnival landscape, so the Hirschauer "Äschadreppler" belong to the marked curiosities.
>
> A curiosity is also the straw from which the rough dress is tied [woven] for the wild fellows and that gives it its name. "Äscha" is –who doesn't know?– still the (dialectal) word for peas. Since long ago, as cattle fodder, this plant is as good as gone from the fields. Where there is no longer any Äscha, there isn't any straw. Thus the jesters' guild members take care of the almost precious material for their "Äschadreppler" themselves. With a lot of effort, the Bear Master of the guild tills a field with peas to provide the necessary straw for the carnival each year. An effort that no spectator suspects when he sees the authentic Hirschauer Äschadreppler parade. It takes a lot of hands to get them dressed up and ready to be sent on the road. Older members and helpers, also from outside the guild, bring their experience to the annual bear tying. The straw tying procedure is very labor intensive and takes about 2 hours per figure.
>
> The Äschadreppler perform only in Hirschau on Carnival Monday, or in rare cases, in an important parade in the neighborhood. [5]

The contrast between costumes constructed with wheat straw as opposed to pea-straw is obvious in the following photo:

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[5] „Aus der Überlieferung wußte man, daß in früheren Zeiten der Äschadreppler und der Strohbär eine herausragende Rolle in Hirschau spielten. Heute findet man diese Urgestalt nur noch ganz vereinzelt in der schwäbisch-alemannischen Fasnetslandschaft, so zählt der Hirschauer »Äschadreppler«, zu den ausgesprochenen Raritäten.

Eine Rarität ist auch das Stroh, aus dem das rauhe Kleid für den wilden Gesellen gebunden wird und das ihm seinen Namen gibt. »Äscha« ist, wer weiß es nicht?, immer noch das Wort für Erbsen. Längst ist dieses Gewächs als Viehfutter von den Äckern so gut wie verschwunden. Wo keine Äscha mehr, da kein Stroh. So beschafft sich die Narrenzunft das fast kostbare Material für ihre »Äschadreppler« selber. Mit viel Mühe baut der Bärenmeister der Zunft jedes Jahr einen Acker mit Erbsen an, die das notwendige Stroh für die Fasnet liefern. Ein Aufwand, den kein Zuschauer ahnt, wenn er bei einem Umzug die urigen Hirschauer Äschadreppler daherkommen sieht. Es bedarf etlicher Hände, bis sie gebunden sind und auf die Straße geschickt werden können. Ältere Mitglieder und Helfer, auch von außerhalb der Zunft, bringen beim jährlichen Bären binden ihre Erfahrung mit ein. Die Einbindeprozedur ist sehr aufwändig und dauert pro Figur ca. 2 Stunden.

Der Äschadreppler tritt nur am Rosenmontag in Hirschau oder in seltenen Fällen bei einem wichtigen Umzug in der Nähe auf.“ Source: http://www.nzh.de/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=12. Translation by Eduard Selleslagh.

Fig. 5. Picture of Strohbären dressed in wheat and pea-straw, respectively. From the 2000 carnival procession of Empfingen, F Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany. Photograph Werner Baiker. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Strohb%C3%A4ren-Empfingen-2000.jpg.

The following is a summary of a talk given in 2010 in the village of Hirschau, Bavaria, by Werner Baiker. Baiker is one of the foremost authorities on this topic as well as the director of the Strohbären Museum. His talk provides more valuable information about this curious custom. It begins with him pointing out that straw bears like the one known as Äschadreppler in Hirschau were once common, but today have become quite rare.

Fig. 6. The outfits made of straw can take different forms. This is where the Hirschauer Äschadrepplers show up on Carnival Monday 2008. Photo: Werner Baiker.

The article published a decade ago in the *Schwäbisches Tagblatt* begins as follows:

> Hirschau has the rustic figure made of pea straw for the Aschadreppler. On Saturday evening, Werner Baiker explained what the straw bears are all about and where they can still be found today.
>
> Tübingen. There is little literature on the forms of wheat, rye, spelled or pea straw. The fools' guild of Hirschau invited straw bear expert Werner Baiker. On Saturday he gave a lecture on straw bears, their distribution and importance. In addition, a good 40 young and older people came to the fire station. Among them is the mayor Ulrich Latus, who is not only a member of the guild of fools, but also a "very loyal bear binder who regularly helps bind the Hirschau Äschadreppler on Monday," as guild master Martin Wekenmann emphasized.
>
> This idiosyncratic tradition, which is still alive in some regions today, is the passion of Werner Baiker and has been since his childhood: "The straw bear fascinated me as a little guy," said the native-born Empfinger, who now lives in Sulz am Neckar. However, the bears currently leave him little rest. He is organizing a special exhibition on the subject in the Carnival Museum Narrenschopf Bad Dürrheim, which will be on display there from January 16 to March 10. There you will not only see photos, but also real straw figures, among other things an Äschadreppler, which the Hirschauer group made especially for the exhibition.[6]

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[6] „Hirschau hat zur Fasnet den Äschadreppler die urige Gestalt aus Erbsenstroh. Am Samstagabend erklärte Werner Baiker, was es mit den Strohbären auf sich hat und wo sie heute noch zu finden sind.

Tübingen. Literatur gibt es nur wenig über die Gestalten aus Weizen-, Roggen-, Dinkel- oder auch Erbsen-Stroh. So hatte die Narrenzunft Hirschau den Strohbären-Experten Werner Baiker eingeladen. Am Samstag hielt er einen Vortrag über Strohbären, ihre Verbreitung und Bedeutung. Dazu waren gut 40 junge und ältere Interessierte ins Feuerwehrhaus gekommen. Darunter auch Ortsvorsteher Ulrich Latus, der nicht nur Mitglied der Narrenzunft, sondern auch ein „ganz treuer Bärenbinder sei, der am Rosenmontag regelmäßig beim Binden der Hirschauer Äschadreppler helfe, wie Zunftmeister Martin Wekenmann hervorhob.

Diese eigenwillige und heute noch in einigen Regionen lebendige Tradition ist die Leidenschaft von Werner Baiker und das seit Kindesbeinen: „Der Strohbär hat mich schon als kleiner Kerle fasziniert, sagte der geborene Empfinger, der heute in Sulz am Neckar lebt. Die Bären treiben ihn jedoch zur Zeit besonders herum: Er organisiert zum Thema eine Sonderausstellung im Fastnachtsmuseum Narrenschopf Bad Dürrheim, die dort vom 16. Januar bis zum 10. März

The article continues, commenting on the customs of the past:

> "In the past, they were actually commonplace," said Baiker, "in the places where there was agriculture, there were also straw bears. In the meantime, however, they have become a rarity and have become something very special. This is mainly due to the "aestheticization of the Carnival," which should be nicer and cleaner. According to Baiker, in the 1950s the appeal was to carry out the Fasnet in an orderly fashion. Figures made of straw no longer fit into the picture, since the straw stayed stuck to the street for about two weeks after a rain,[7]
>
> There is hardly any literature on the different shapes: "The straw bear was actually not interesting to write about. He was too common and came from the lower social classes, said the bear enthusiast Baiker. As far as he knows, the oldest mention dates back to 1852 and from neighboring Wurmlingen. It describes how a man, wrapped in straw and accompanied by instruments, goes from house to house and solicits gifts. Above all, these were young men who received the three white gifts from the petitions: eggs, lard and flour.
>
> The tradition could be influenced by the Sinti and Roma, who went through the places with their dancing bears and asked for gifts. Even today, so-called drovers usually lead the straw bears in many places, and musicians often accompany them. In addition, these groups do not (only) take part in parades but move about through the town and from house to house to collect donations.[8]

The Baiker's talk contains additional information of significant interest:

> The straw figures used to move and sometimes still, not only wander through the streets for carnival, but also for other special occasions: for church consecrations or for festive occasions in the liturgical calendar such as Martini, Nicholas, Christmas Eve, Easter, Pentecost, or the birth of the Virgin.
>
> Some places have revived their own traditions. In southern Germany, Thuringia, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate and above all Hessen they are there again: "It is incredible what straw bears would still be running, Baiker is enthusiastic about Hessen. But there are also similar traditions in France, England, Italy, and some Eastern European countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic that use straw.
>
> In the second half of his two-hour lecture, Baiker showed photos from various regions. His picture show turned out to be a colorful to absurd kaleidoscope of straw figures: near Gießen, for example, a group tried to avoid

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zu sehen sein wird. Dort wird es nicht nur Fotos, sondern auch richtige Strohgestalten zu sehen geben, unter anderem einen Äschadreppler, den die Hirschauer eigens für die Ausstellung angefertigt haben." (Wegner, 2010)."

[7] The straw the was left behind as the straw bears passed through the streets was difficult to clean up once it got wet.

[8] „Früher waren sie eigentlich alltäglich", sagte Baiker, „in den Orten, in denen es Landwirtschaft gab, gabs auch Strohbären. Mittlerweile aber seien sie selten und damit zu etwas ganz Besonderem geworden. Dies liege vor allem in der „Ästhetisierung der Fasnet" begründet, die schöner und sauberer werden sollte. „Die Fasnet in geordnete Bahnen zu lenken, soll der Aufruf laut Baiker in den fünfziger Jahren gelautet haben. Gestalten aus Stroh, das nach einem Regen etwa noch zwei Wochen auf der Straße klebte, habe da nicht mehr ins Bild gepasst.

Literatur gibt es über die verschiedenen Gestalten kaum: „Der Strohbär war eigentlich nicht interessant zum drüber schreiben. Er war zu allgemein und stammte aus den unteren sozialen Schichten, sagte der Bären-Begeisterte Baiker. Die älteste Erwähnung stammt seines Wissens aus dem Jahr 1852 und aus dem benachbarten Wurmlingen. Darin wird beschrieben, wie ein Mann, in Stroh gewickelt und von Instrumenten begleitet, von Haus zu Haus geht und Gaben erbittet. Dies seien vor allem junge Männer gewesen, die bei den Bittgängen vor allem die drei weißen Gaben erhielten: Eier, Schmalz und Mehl.

Beeinflusst könnte die Tradition durch die Sinti und Roma sein, die mit ihren tanzenden Bären durch die Flecken zogen und Gaben erbaten. Noch heute führen in vielen Orten so genannte Treiber meist die Strohbären, Musikanten begleiten sie häufig dabei. Außerdem gehen diese Gruppen nicht (nur) in Umzügen mit, sondern ziehen durch den Ort und von Haus zu Haus, um Spenden einzusammeln" (Wegner, 2010).

binding by experimenting with hot glue. In Altensteig-Walddorf, the straw figures are up to four meters high on St. Nicholas Day.

In the Vogelsberg area, the rough fellows wear hats and witch masks, elsewhere they are decorated with colorful ribbons, have tails up to 20 meters long, or even wear a gas mask. In a village near Künzelsau, students from the seventh grade (after which earlier youngsters left school) dry rye straw, so that the straw bear gleams like gold in the sunlight, as Baiker enthusiastically explains. "I am grateful to every collective that picks up on the tradition, especially in its original form and technique of binding." Baiker expressed his appreciation to the Hirschauers. In order to be able to bind the Äschadreppler every year, the bear master plants a field with peahaulm so that a stable supply of pea straw is also available for the bears.

At the end, Baiker projected the photo of a replica of a primeval man who had a woven mat with him. The straw bear expert wanted to show that the material is something that has been with people since time immemorial: "Since the time of Ötzi, people have handled straw and grass. (Wegner, 2010). [9]

5.0 The *Buttnmandl*: Additional observations on customs associated with the harvesting and conservation of the 'last sheaf'

Bearing in mind the comment by Praneuf that the 'last sheaf' was an odd ritual practiced throughout Germany, even more bizarre are the *Erbsenbären*, also called *Buttnmandl*, whose costumes are composed of stalks of long-stem threshed straw topped by scary masks.

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[9] „Die Strohgestalten zogen früher und ziehen zum Teil heute noch nicht nur zur Fasnet durch die Straßen, sondern auch zu anderen besonderen Anlässen: zu Kirchweihen etwa oder zu Festtagen im liturgischen Kalender wie Martini, Nikolaus, Heiligabend, Ostern, Pfingsten, oder Mariä Geburt.

Einige Orte haben ihre je eigene Tradition wieder aufleben lassen. In Süddeutschland, Thüringen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Rheinland-Pfalz und vor allem Hessen gibt es sie wieder: „Das ist unglaublich, was die an Strohbären noch laufe hätt, ist Baiker von den Hessen begeistert. Aber auch in Frankreich, England, Italien, und einigen osteuropäischen Ländern wie Polen und Tschechien gibt es ähnliche Traditionen, die auf Stroh zurückgreifen.

In der zweiten Hälfte seines zweistündigen Vortrags zeigte Baiker Fotos aus den verschiedensten Regionen. Seine Bilderschau entpuppte sich dabei als buntes bis absurdes Kaleidoskop der Strohgestalten: In der Nähe von Gießen etwa hat sich eine Gruppe versucht vor dem Binden zu drücken, indem sie mit Heißkleber experimentierten. In Altensteig-Walddorf sind die Stroh-Gestalten am Nikolaustag bis zu vier Meter hoch.

Im Gebiet Vogelsberg tragen die kratzigen Gesellen Hut und Hexenmaske, andernorts sind sie mit bunten Bändern geschmückt, haben bis zu 20 Meter lange Schwänze oder tragen gar eine Gasmaske. In einem Dorf bei Künzelsau enthalmen die Schüler der siebten Klasse (nach der die Jugendlichen früher von der Schule abgingen) das Roggenstroh, so dass der Strohbär im Sonnenlicht wie vergoldet glänzt, wie Baiker begeistert erzählt.

„Ich bin jeder Gemeinde dankbar, die die Tradition aufgreift vor allem in der originalen Form und Technik des Bindens, sprach Baiker den Hirschauern seine Anerkennung aus. Um die Äschadreppler jedes Jahr binden zu können, baut der Bärenmeister extra ein Feld mit Erbsen an, damit es auch sicher Erbsen-Stroh für die Bären gibt.

Zum Ende zeigt Baiker das Foto eines nachgebildeten Urzeitmenschen, der eine geflochtene Matte bei sich hat. Der Strohbären-Experte wollte damit zeigen, dass das Material etwas ist, das den Menschen seit Urzeiten begleitet: „Seit dem Ötzi ist der Mensch mit Stroh und Gras umgegangen" (Wegner, 2010)[9]

Fig. 7. Examples of the *Buttenmänner*, Pea Haulm Bears, companions of St. Nicholas, Berchtesgadener Land, Germany, 1958. Photo Wolf Lücking. Reproduced in Weber–Kellermann (1978: 30).

The following photographs show the Buttnmandl taking part in a pre-Christmas tradition in the municipalities of Berchtesgaden and Bischofswiesen, Germany. Berchtesgaden is a municipality in the German Bavarian Alps, located in the south district of Berchtesgadener Land in Bavaria, near the border with Austria, some 30 km south of Salzburg and 180 km southeast of Munich while Biscofswiesen is another municipality in the district of Berchtesgadener Land.

Fig. 8. Map of Berchtesgadener Land. Source: https://www.google.com/maps/place/Bischofswiesen,+Germany/@47.6561136,12.8857004,15172m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m2!3m1!1s0x4776ed37d82e75a7:0x41d25a40937b780.

These straw bears run about, shouting and ringing the cowbells attached to their backs. They are regularly accompanied by *Kramperl*, individuals who are dressed in skins, wearing a

frightening mask with a lolling red tongue who act as their leaders and keepers. The term *Buttn* is a dialect expression sometimes associated with the ringing of the great bells which the Buttnmandl wear on their backs as well as with concepts such as ‘shake’ and ‘toss back and forth’.

Fig. 9. Buttnmandl with their Kamperl coming together in front of the Watzmann (2713m), Germany’s second-highest mountain, an awe inspiring panorama in Berchtesgaden, Germany, December 2010. Source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/360076932687867456/.

Fig. 10. Below. Buttnmandl and Kamperl in Bischofswiesen, Germany. Source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/360076932687783697/.

Fig. 11. A close-up of the Buttnmandl of Bischofswiesen. Source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/393502086169035651/.

As is the case with other Alpine locations (Frank & Ridderstad 2013) that remained relatively isolated because of their difficult access prior to the introduction of modern forms of transport, Berchtesgadener Land has retained its unique customs and characteristic Buttnmandl.

Fig. 12. Another view of Bischofswiesen. Source: http://tinyurl.com/Bischofswiesen.

The extremely rugged nature of the surrounding terrain is epitomized by this view from the Eagle's Nest, built in 1933 to serve as Hitler's second command post. Located in Obersaltzberg, just 3 km away from the village of Berchtesgaden, it commands a breathtaking panoramic view of the Bavarian and Austrian Alps stretching some 200 km.

Fig. 13. The *Kehlsteinhaus* (Eagle's Nest). Source: http://www.tourismusverein-bischofswiesen-berchtesgadener-land.de/dynasite.cfm?dsmid=63464.

In recent years, with the ability that the members of the public now have to access You Tube videos, we have a far better understanding of the traditions associated with the characters known as Buttnmandl and Kramperl as well as their activities and interactions with onlookers. And excellent collection of recent videos can be found at: http://www.berchtesgadeninfo.de/de/kultur-brauchtum-alpen/buttnmandllaffn.html.

Fig. 14. Source: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buttnmandllauf.

As can be seen, the Buttnmandl are not merely passive companions of St. Nikolaus and the *Nikoloweibl*, the young girl that accompanies St. Nicholas. Instead, the Buttnmandl form an integral part of the traditional house visits and the interrogations of young children. Moreover, these videos allow us to appreciate the way that the straw costumes of the Buttnmandl are

fabricated, how the straw is tied as well as the variety of masks utilized by the other actors. We should not underestimate the role of social media in the groundswell of the enthusiasm and public support for these ancient customs which seem to be gaining momentum with each passing year. At the same time, we need to keep in mind the ethnographic value of these videos which is quite remarkable. For instance, they demonstrate in great detail not only how the straw is tied and clipped, but also how pre-Christian traditions have come to be intertwined with Christian beliefs and practices.[10]

The question that presents itself is the following: does the difference in climate or the timing of the performances help explain the nature of the costumes worn by the actors in different parts of Europe? Did the differences in the winter climate of the locations end up affecting the choice of material used for the costumes of the participants? Did all the actors originally wear straw padding under their fur coats, rather than having straw be the outer coat as it is in many locations today? In other words, could the climate have caused the performers to shed the outer layer, their furry coat, leaving them encased only in woven straw padding or even loose straw? Or is the fact that some of the actors continue to don furry outer clothing, namely, those who accompany the straw bears, indicative of differences in the original cast and functions of the different characters: did some wear a costume made only of straw while others were dressed more like bears with straw as an undercoat. Or should we interpret the two types of costumes, one more bear-like in appearance than the other, as a kind of visual stratigraphy: the straw costumes with no furry outer coat representing a more recent stratum? I should mention that there is another reason that may have contributed to straw padding being used under some type of outer coat. But that topic lies outside the scope of this investigation and will be taken up in a separate study (Frank, in prep.-b.)

Examples of 'bears' who have lost or misplaced the outer layer of their costume are recorded in a number of locations. For instance, we have the gunnysack clad characters from the village of Lesaka in the Basque Country whose name, Azaku Zaharrak or Asaku Zaharrak, goes back etymologically to Hamalau-Zaingo-Zaharra, a term that, in turn, is directly linked to the figure of Hamalau, the half-human, half-bear ancestor of humans who is also the protagonist of the Bear's Son Tales (Frank, 2008b, 2019, in prep.-a).

[10] The following videos are highly recommended: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=joaZfZLnFCQ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YV4pt6NZWdQ ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXq073okUlI ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzjPJ3fpzdo ; http://tinyurl.com/Buttnmandl ; http://www.yt.fully.pk/watch/cYdTRe79Pcg ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EELsvnjC1M ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uggy9KE6cP4; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvIzQ50RIOA. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFBKVhN8Z80. For other videos of the house visits with St. Nicholaus and the Krampus, cf. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXiekVGyxkU. entitled "Hausbesuch der Fischacher Perchten mit Nikolaus" and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bdHr8Kdocc called "Nichloaus und Krampus mit Tobias" where the fear of the child is real.

Fig. 15. Lesaka *Asaku Zaharrak*, 2007. Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/dantzan/724934332/in/set-72157600656899313/.

Similarly clad bear-men can be found in other locations, although, once again, it is unclear what caused the diversification that characterizes the costumes worn by these bears in different parts of Europe. As has been mentioned, it could be that in times past a sturdy straw underpadding was necessary to protect the performer from the blows he received, as he went about conducting house visits, blows that fell on the back of the animal and that were intended to allow it to ritually carry away all negative forces and ensure the health and well-being of those visited (Frank, in prep.-b).

Certainly, the costumes worn by bear performers across Europe show a great variety of materials and designs, as Fréger demonstrates by his collection of photographic evidence. Meanwhile it is also important to note that Fréger, in his photographic study of the European performers, writes the following concerning the figure of the "Wild Man", known in German as *Wilder Mann* and in French as *L'Homme sauvage*. Fréger's comments are based on the pan-European folktale called the Bear's Son, who is

> according to legend a son born of the union of a bear and a woman, whether by consent or not. Belonging to two worlds and knowing the intricacies of both, this mythological being is considered a 'superheroe' […]. In most cases the Wild Man wears a costume made of natural materials or animal skins, his face is rendered unrecognizable, either by a mask or by a costume that covers him entirely, or by a black make-up. An accessory –a stick, a club or something similar—and one or more bells complete his outfit. (Fréger, 2012: 243).

The double-souled nature of this figure, half bear and half human, allowed it to be conceived as a kind of intermediary being who bridged the connection between humans and their bear ancestors. This has a parallel in Christianity where a similar role is played by Jesus Christ, born of a human female but whose father was the Holy Spirit, in short, an intermediary, partly human and partly divine. However, there is a major difference in that the older ursine cosmology appears to be one in which real human beings, properly dressed in fur suits, fulfilled this role of intermediary, watching over the community, both in a physical and spiritual sense. As noted, Good Luck Visits

have been viewed as performances intended to ensure the well-being of the members of each community. In these performances humans, dressed as bear-humans, donning special clothing, as if they, too, were dual-natured beings, carried out their duties vis-à-vis the community.

What is well documented is the fact that previously in Europe the humans acted as bear-leaders. There is solid evidence from the Balkans, Estonia and parts of Russia that in the early 20th century a real bear still accompanied the retinue on visits to the households (Sokolova, 2000; Vucanovič, 1959). It is not clear at what point straw bears, that is, humans dressed entirely or partly as bears, replaced the real flesh and blood bears who had been trained to take part in these visits or whether there were always to two types of performances, one older than the other. If so, the more ancient one could have involved a real bear with its human companion, the person who would control and lead the bear about. In this case, perhaps it was the leader who represented the intermediary between bears and humans. The second and possibly more recent iteration of the performances might have been one in which two main protagonists, two sets of human actors took part, one playing the role of the bear and the other the role of the bear-leader, the latter being equipped with a rod or even a whip to keep his charge or charges under control.

Fig. 16. Buttnmandl and Kamperl in the village of Bischofswiesen, Germany.Matthias Schrader/Associated Press. Source: http://okok1111111111.blogspot.com/2012/12/festival.html?m=1.

Keeping in mind Fréger's comments, when we look at the Buttnmandl and the Kamperl, it is the appearance and role of the latter that is of particular interest at this point for their costume and actions suggest that they are acting as bear-leaders, incarnations of this same supernatural half-human, half-bear intermediary being.

6.0 Changes in the make-up of the retinue: The mystery of the wicker basket

Today in Bavaria St. Nicholas is often accompanied by one or more young women who, clad immaculately in white, clearly are attached to the Christian-oriented contingent of the performers. One of them has a prop, a wicker basket or satchel, an object that will be treated in more detail in the sections that follow.

Fig. 17. St. Nicholas and his retinue. Source: https://www.facebook.com/522865824521756/photos/a.656201757854828.1073741857.522865824521756/656471004494570/?type=3&theater.

The custom of having these 'angels' accompany St. Nicholas can be traced back to Reformation attempts to introduce the figure of *Christkindl* as the gift-giver and, therefore, focus attention on December 25th, the date assigned to the birth of the Christ Child. This campaign was accompanied by efforts to shift attention away from December 6th and from the role played by St. Nicholas and his often-furry companions as gift-givers. Indeed, at that point in time St. Nicholas, now dressed as a bishop, rather than as a masked and shaggy figure, was viewed as the principal gift-giver. But the house visits were conducted mainly on December 6th. This distressed the Protestant pastors of the time. For example, in the early 17th century we find a Protestant minister bitterly complaining that parents put presents in their children's beds and would be told that it was St. Nicholas who had brought them. This practice, according to the minister, "is a bad custom, because it points children to the saint, while yet we know that not St. Nicholas but the holy Christ Child gives us all good things for body and soul, and He alone it is whom we ought to call upon" (Tille, 1893: 32 f., cited in Miles, 1912: 230).

Thus, as we shall soon see, the ultimate origins of these 'angels' reach back to events that took place in the 16th and 17th centuries, a time when Protestants rejected the Roman Catholic form of veneration of saints and thus also the worship of St. Nicholas. That rejection was accompanied by efforts to replace St. Nicholas as the gift-giver and turn those duties over to the Holy Christ.

Protestants intended the latter term to be a reference to Jesus Christ. And these efforts were a deliberate attempt to substitute the Christ Child for St. Nicholas as the bringer of gifts.

Over the years, in Alsace, the term *Christkindl* became increasingly associated with a female figure, dressed in white and having an angelic appearance who was in charge of bringing gifts. The woman who represents Christkind has her face made up with flour. She comes wearing a crown of gold paper with lighted candles on it. She regularly appears holding a silver bell in one hand and in the other, a basket of sweetmeats. But old traditions die hard for she is followed by the terrible Hans Trapp, who according to Miles, was dressed in a bearskin with a blackened face, long beard and threatening rod. He "'goes for' the naughty children, who are only saved by the intercession of Christkind" (Miles, 1912: 230).

Fig. 18. Christkind and Hans Trapp in Alsace, 1850. Reproduced in Weber-Kellermann (1978: 35).

At the beginning of 20th century, Miles wrote the following concerning the Christkind in his classic study *Christmas Customs and Traditions: Christian and Pagan*:

> The Christ Child, "Christkind", so familiar to German children, has now become a sort of mythical figure, a product of sentiment and imagination working so freely as almost to forget the sacred character of the original. Christkind bears little resemblance to the Infant of Bethlehem; he is quite a tall child, and is often represented by a girl dressed in white with long fair hair. He, hovers, indeed, between the character of the Divine Infant and that of an angel, and is regarded more as a kind of good fairy than anything else. (Miles, 1912: 230)

Often Christkind was associated with a small child, usually female, depicted with blond hair and angelic wings. Although Martin Luther may have intended it to be a reference to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, in Germany and Austria, the Christ Child came to be interpreted as a specific angel in charge of bringing presents, and as a result a young girl dressed as an angel regularly takes part in the processions alongside St. Nicholas, the Buttnmmandl and the Kamperl.

Fig. 19. Christkind mit Bilderbuch. Ausschnitt aus der Erstausgabe des Struwwelpeter (1845). Source: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christkind#/media/File:Christkind_in_Struwwelpeter_1845.jpg.

These angelic representations were popularized by Christmas time parade customs and nativity plays, which often had a host of angels led by a 'Christ Child'. The Christkind spread initially across Protestant Germany. Later, the custom moved into the Rhineland, then together with Advent and Christmas to Bavaria and Austria.

In summary, the *Christkind* (sometimes known affectionately as *Christkindl*) is viewed as a traditional gift-giver at Christmas time, mainly in European countries, including Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Liechtenstein, Hungary, Slovakia and Switzerland. As noted, the word Christkind translates to 'Christ Child'. The Christkind, depicted as an angelic figure with blond hair and wings, appears on vintage Christmas postcards, like the one below (*Fig. 20*), enveloped in a magical aura. And the counterpart of these angelic beings are the flesh and blood angels that accompany St. Nicholas on his rounds, shown in the photo above (*Fig. 17*). But these figures move about the countryside leading a troupe of performers of pagan ancestry. Moreover, even though in Europe valiant efforts were made by the followers of Luther to introduce the figure of Christkind and eliminate the veneration of St. Nicholas, that effort resulted in the assimilation of this Christian element into the older pre-Christian framework. In the United States, the figure known affectionately as Christkindl, rather than decreasing the popularity of St. Nicholas, ended up being converted into a nickname for the saint himself, anglicized to Kris Kringle, while, as we will see, similar semantic transfers occurred across Germany.

Fig. 20. The *Christkindl*. Photo by vintagehalloweencollector on flickr.com.

We can now turn to the mystery posed by the wicker basket carried by the *Nikoloweibl*, the ‘female’ character who accompanies the troupe. Based on a photograph (*Fig. 24* below) taken in 1958 in Demmin, Pommern, Germany, previously the individual who carried the basket was dressed in black and wore nothing that had an explicit Christian connotation. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that the individual playing this role was a man, that is, a man cross-dressed as a woman. The purpose of the basket is somewhat unclear. It might have been where eggs and sausages collected from the households visited were placed or, inversely, it might have been used to carry goodies for the young children. Another interpretation, a linguistically well-grounded one, is that an ample supply of grease and soot was once carried about in such a basket. The latter interpretation comes from a photograph taken around 1930 (*Fig. 21*) in which a basket was carried by a similar ‘female’ figure who together with a male counterpart are referred to in the text as the *Schmalzbäckerpaar*, the ‘lard-baker-couple’.

Fig. 21. Father Christmas (*Weihnachtsmann*) with the White-Horse (*Schimmel*) and two companions, (*Schmalzbäckerpaar*), one of which is a 'female' carrying a basket with grease and outfitted with a bird's beak, probably associated with the stork character, and carrying a wooden rod. Demmin, Pommern, Germany. c. 1930. Photo Wolf Lüking. Source: Museum Stralsund. Reproduced in Weber–Kellermann (1978: 29).

In the photograph above, a square wooden container can be seen inside the basket itself. This suggests that the box might have been used for collecting donations from those visited, although it could have been used equally to store the mixture of lard and soot. The photograph in question also comes from Demmin, Pommern, Germany, and rather than featuring St. Nikolas, we have Father Christmas. At the same time, the fact that the female figure, standing next to the *Schimmel*, is wearing what looks like a bird's beak, suggests that she is also playing the role of the *Storch*. It should be noted that it is not uncommon for the bear-leader to be accompanied by other traditional characters such as the Stork and the Grey Mare.

Fig. 22. Location of Demmin, Pommern, Germany. Source: https://www.google.com/maps/place/Demmin,+Germany/@53.9228328,4.0690935,5z/data=!4m2!3m1!1s0x47ab855d8af72fd9:0xcd38cf50e652bae9.

Now, as can be seen in the following recent photographs featuring St. Nicholas, the Buttnmandl and Kamperl (*Fig. 23*), we find a young girl carrying a satchel or purse rather than a basket. But she doesn't have the look of an angel. Indeed, she is dressed in traditional garb, albeit her Sunday best.

Fig. 23. St. Nicholas and his retinue. Source: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buttnmandllauf.

In other words, whereas much earlier a straw basket may have been an element that had a concrete, practical purpose in the performances, in this instance it has morphed into what appears to be a relatively meaningless prop (*Fig. 23*). At the same time, the addition of young girls, dressed as angels, who accompany St. Nicholas, further emphasizes the Christian component of the hybrid performance. Another remarkable example of the mixed nature of the performances where the older traditions are given a veneer of Christianity, lies in the fact that prior to setting out the Buttnmandl and their retinue gather to say a prayer: "Before the run, all Basses [Butnmandl groups] repeat the Lord's Prayer, recite an Ave Maria and occasionally the Angelus, then the farmer's wife blesses the Buttnmandl and Gankerl with holy water."[11]

In this manner, enactments of the Good Luck Visits came to acquire a stamp of Christian approval which allows both the old and the new to live in harmony. Although today there seems to be no opposition to having two radically different sets of actors taking part in the same performance, there is good reason to believe that this compromise was not reached without significant conflict. Moreover, the fact that such a compromise was achieved at all reveals the degree to which the older customs were valued by the populace.

At the same time, we see that in the Good Luck Visits regularly conducted in this zone by the Buttnmandl and their Kamperl, rather than receiving material thanks for their efforts, there have been other changes. On the one and, there has been:a noticeable generational down-grading for the performance is now often directed more toward children rather than adults. And on the other hand,

[11] Source : https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buttnmandllauf. "Vor dem Lauf beten alle Bassn ein Vater unser, ein Ave Maria und vereinzelt für die Verstorbenen den Engel des Herrn, anschließend werden die Buttnmandl und Gankerl von der Bäuerin mit Weihwasser gesegnet."

an inversion has taken place in the roles played by the visitors and householders visited: it is now customary for those who carry out the visit to hand out gifts, sweets, nuts, and other goodies, albeit primarily only to children:

> Buttmandl running is a tradition centered on house visits: The costumed men and boys (women traditionally do not take part) go, led by St. Nicholas, from house to house and visit the families assembled there. The Buttnmandl approach the homesteads and estates with loud bell ringing and wild screams, led by Nikolaus. Having been greeted by "Praise be to Jesus Christ" and sprinkled with holy water by the landlord, the performer playing St. Nikolaus along with his wild horde enters the living room. After giving three blows with his crosier, he stops and exhorts the Buttnmandl to rest. St. Nicholas also greets the families with "Praise be to Jesus Christ" and begins with the praising and reprimanding. The children sing songs and recite prayers and poems. As a reward, they get gifts (apples, nuts, guatln and a fruit-laden bread called Kletzenbrot), and the naughty older youth (of course young girls are popular) are dragged out of the room and thrown into the snow. After a while the spectacle ends, and the troupe moves on to the next house.[12]

In addition, it appears that over time the rowdy 'female' character who carried the basket in times past, has been converted into a pristinely dressed young girl, an angelic representative of Christkindl. She is the one who carries the gentrified counterpart of that wicker container whose prior contents are still somewhat obscure. However, as has been discussed, there is reason to believe that previously it served a practical purpose either to carry away the food items given to the visitors by the householders or, alternatively, to house a mixture of grease, soot and ashes which was smeared on the faces of those present. The following photographs show the contrast between the new and the old depiction of the 'female' figure and her wicker basket in the same location, that is, Bertchesgaden. In other locations in Bavaria, as was shown above (*Fig. 17*), two young girls accompany St. Nikolas, dressed immaculately in white, equipped with wings that turn them into 'angels' while one of them still carries a wicker basket. The former rough looking lower class, 'female' character equipped with a wicker basket (portrayed in *Fig. 21*) has disappeared entirely. The only female element remaining are the young girls who clearly form part of the Christian side of the equation, a portrayal in which the purity and even celestial attributes of the female characters are emphasized.

What is also still unclear is to what extent the current distribution of roles is in anyway a direct continuation of the earlier custom in which there was a 'female' character who carried a wicker basket and wore a bird's peak. Apparently, the 'angel' is often equipped with wings and dressed in white, but she does not always carry a basket. Moreover, when two 'angels' are present, one of

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[12] „*Buttnmandllaufen* ist ein Einkehrbrauch: Die verkleideten Männer und Jungen (Frauen nehmen traditionell nicht teil) gehen, angeführt vom hl. Nikolaus, von Haus zu Haus und besuchen dort die versammelten Familien. Mit lautem Geläut und wildem Geschrei, angeführt vom Nikolaus, nähern sich die *Buttnmandl* den Lehen und Anwesen. Begrüßt durch Gelobt sei Jesus Christus und vom Hausherrn mit Weihwasser besprengt, betritt der Darsteller des hl. Nikolaus mit seiner wilden Horde die Wohnstube. Nach dreimaligem Aufschlagen mit dem Krummstab gebietet er Einhalt und ermahnt die Buttnmandl, Ruhe zu geben. Der Nikolaus begrüßt ebenfalls die Familien mit „Gelobt sei Jesus Christus" und beginnt mit Lob und Tadel. Die Kinder singen Lieder und tragen Gebete und Gedichte vor. Zur Belohnung bekommen sie Geschenke (Äpfel, Nüsse, Guatln und Kletzenbrot), und die unartigen älteren Jugendlichen (beliebt sind natürlich die jungen Mädchen) werden aus der Stube gezerrt und in den Schnee geworfen. Nach einer Weile endet das Spektakel, und die Bass zieht weiter zum nächsten Haus." Source : https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buttnmandllauf.

them has a basket in her hand and the other one does not. Hence it is this well-appointed companion of St. Nicholas, dressed in white or in traditional clothing, who goes about with a basket in her hand. So, the question is whether she represents a structural continuation of the more primitive 'female' character shown in the photograph below from 1958 (*Fig. 24*) and in the earlier photograph from the 1930s (*Fig. 21*), or whether she is the result of the more recent attempts to introduce a female version of Christkind.

Fig. 24. St. Nicholas with his companions in Bertchesgaden, Bavaria 1958. Photo Wolf Lüking. Reproduced in Weber-Kellermann (1978: 33).

It is obvious that this modification in the cast of characters is relatively recent, although the exact date when the Christkind 'angels' started to form part of the retinue is uncertain. In the photograph from 1958, we saw the 'female' character, again undoubtedly a man dressed as a woman, standing next to St. Nicholas with a basket in one hand and a bundle of faggots in the other which was probably mean to be a switch. Another reason to assume that we are talking about a cross-dressed individual is the fact that in the past only men and young boys were allowed to participate in these Good Luck Visits. Indeed, there is some evidence that previously the role of the *Nikoloweibl* was played by a man, outfitted as a female. It appears that later this role was taken over by a boy also dressed as a girl. With time, young girls came to occupy that role and a fully Christian element was contributed by the character change in question. Still there is further variation in terms of costume worn by the person who plays this role. For instance, in Loipl / Bischofswiesen and in Schönau am Königssee we find the *Nikoloweibl* still not converted into an 'angel' as is the case in Winkl / Bischofswiesen (MH, 2015).

In summary, the 'angels' can be easily interpreted as a new element that attests to the fact that attempts to create top-down changes can have unforeseen results. The figure of the Christkind, imagined originally by Luther's followers as Jesus Christ and intended to counteract the popularity of St. Nicholas, ended up being radically reshaped, and after undergoing a gender shift, ended up right beside the saint, leading the band of Buttnmandl and their attendants. The reasons that led to

the suppression of the older 'female' character in these performances deserve further attention. Then there is the question of what caused the other characters to disappear, such as the *Schimmel* and the *Storch*. On the other hand, whereas in the past the *Bär* and his trainer appear to have been represented by only two actors, it appears that there has been a major reshaping of the cast of characters so that now there are dozens of bears, the Buttnmandl, accompanied by fur-clad performers, the Kamperl bear-leaders who themselves have a definitely bear-like appearance, but whose role is to watch over the Buttnmandl and control the crowds.

7.0 Further analysis of the characters making up the cast of Good Luck Visits

Returning to an analysis of the characters represented in the photograph taken in Pommern c. 1930 (*Fig. 21*), showing Father Christmas (*Weihnachtsmann*) with a White-Horse (*Schimmel*). There are his two companions (*Schmalzbäckerpaar*), one of which is a 'female' carrying a basket probably filled with grease and soot. She is outfitted with a bird's beak and stick. Consequently, we might conclude that by the 1930s two different roles had collapsed into only one. In this respect we might recall that in much of Europe a pseudo 'female' character—a man-woman—showed up, portrayed as overtly sexually provocative as were other characters, including the bears themselves for they would embrace men and women alike often throwing them to the ground and rolling around on top of them, and in some locations, even feigning the act of copulation with them. However, the overt sexual connotations of these performances have been toned down in recent years. Then there was another character known as an Eagle, Stork or Crane who is identified in the 1930's photo only minimally by the a 'beak' attached to the person's nose, while in other locations the outfit worn by the actor was and is still much more explicit as is the case of the 'Stork' character of the Polish traditional theatrical group called Wegajty Projekt.[13]

[13] For additional information on the figure of the Eagle, Stork or Crane, cf. Frank (2021).

Fig. 25. A Polish Stick-Stork from a 2007 performance. Source: Wegajty Projekt (P.C.).

Fig. 26. St. Nicholas with two of his furry companions in Bavaria 1958. Photo Wolf Lüking. Reproduced in Weber-Kellermann (1978: 29).

We should emphasize that the ritualized script and sequence of actions carried out in these Bavarian house visits (e.g., as shown in *Fig. 26*) are slightly different from those in other parts of Germany. As has been indicated previously, the Bavarian Buttnmandl and their retinue are composed of a mixture of Christian and pre-Christian elements. Hence, we have a division of roles with a distinct but opposing role assigned to each of the main actors: he who rewards and he who punishes. It should be noted that in other locations, only one figure appears, known as *der Pelzmärte*, *der Pelznickel*, Hans Trapp or Knecht Ruprecht, and although his presence often frightens children, he is in charge of distributing both punishments and rewards (*cf. Fig. 27* & 28).

Fig. 27. Franz von Pocci (1807–1876): *Der Pelzmärtel*, 1846. Reproduced in Weber–Kellermann (1978: 32).

Fig. 28. Franz Regi Göz. Knecht Ruprecht 1784. Reproduced in Weber-Kellermann (1978: 32).

Another example comes from the Mittelmark where the name of *de hêle Christ* ("the Holy Christ") is given, quite strangely, to a skin- or straw-clad man, elsewhere called Knecht Ruprecht, Klas, or Joseph (*Fig. 28*). Here again we see a blending of pre-Christian and Christian elements. In the Ruppin district the man dresses up in white, with ribbons, carries a large pouch, and is called *Christmann* or *Christpuppe*. He is accompanied by a *Schimmelreiter* and a troupe of *Feien* with blackened faces. As the procession goes round from house to house, the *Schimmelreiter* enters

first, followed by *Christpuppe* who makes the children repeat some verse of Scripture or a hymn. If they know it well, he rewards them with gingerbreads from his wallet; if not, he beats them with a bundle filled with ashes. Then both he and the *Schimmelreiter* dance and pass on. Only then are the *Feien* allowed to enter; they jump about and frighten the children (Miles, 1912: 230-231).

Further evidence for several of the characters who were members of the cast is found in this pictorial representation of *Der Weihnahtsmann.*[14] Drawing on traditions from Pommersche, concretely from the region of Pryritzer Weizacker, and dating from around 1890, we have a wood engraving based on an original sketch (*Fig. 29*). It shows *Knecht Ruprecht* with his sack and switch, accompanied by three of the standard main characters and one somewhat less common one: 1) the bear (*Bär*) and trainer; 2) the White Mare (*Schimmel)*; 3) the Stork (*Storch*); and 4) the Goat (*Schnabbuck*) (Weinbeck 1898: 8-15). The Goat character, often viewd as a good-luck goat, occasionally shows up as an auxiliary member of the cast, particularly in northern Europe, although it does not normally form part of the retinue further to the south (Frank & Ridderstad, 2013).

Fig. 29. *Knecht Ruprecht mit Bär, Storch, Schimmel und Schnabbuck* (c. 1890). Pyritzer Weizacker. Source: Walter Borchers, *Pommersche Weihnachtsbräuche, Ausgabe Weihnachten* (1935). Image from the collection of Ireck Andreas Litzbarski. https://www.flickr.com/photos/94791180@N06/11448770725.

Before leaving this topic, I would like to point out the strong possibility that earlier the cast of actors was more diversified and the script—governing the sequence of actions assigned to each

[14] The full description of the wood engraving is *Der Weihnachtmann – ein pommersche Volksbrauch am Heiligabend Holtztich nach Originalskizze*.

actor—was much more complex. Indeed, there is reason to believe that standing behind the complexity of these modern performances as recorded at the beginning of the 20th century was an even more elaborate plotline and set of actions. In other words, the further back we go, the more obvious it becomes that there was once a standard cast of characters who took part in these Good-Luck Visits, although the precise nature of the theatrical performance is still not clear.

For example, we have the interview that Weber-Kellermann (1978: 29) conducted with Lina Kellermann (born 1890) who recalls customs dating from a period around 1900. At that point in time, the performances involved six distinct characters. The informant, Lina Kellermann, was from Maleiken/Masuren, Ostpreußen (East Prussia) which is currently part of Poland. Given the ethnographic importance of the interview, here is a full English translation of it:

> Today I can write you a report about the beginning of Christmas, and more particularly as told by an old man [Lina Kellermann] who was [present] there. He used to live not far from us in the district of Gerdauen.
>
> 6 men took part, of course, all disguised. The first was a guardsman (*Gendarm*), then came the White-horse-rider (*Schimmelreiter*), who rode on a stick with a horse's head at the front end of it, with a white sheet hanging over his two legs; third, the Stork (*Storch*) with a long nose, into which a needle was jammed; fourth, a Chimney Sweep (*Schornsteinfiger*); fifth, a Barber (*Barbier*); and sixth, a Gypsy woman (*Zigeunerin*).
>
> When entering the house the guardsman would ask whether they were allowed to enter. The White-horse rider—who always had to be an especially nimble and skillful man—hopped with his improvised riding animal onto the tables and benches. When the table was set with cups, plates and glasses, there were of course potsherds. The Stork pinched and pecked everyone he could catch, with his beak. The Chimney Sweep with his black costume hugged and kissed everyone who wasn't able to flee. The Barber so thoroughly smeared his victims with lather, whipped up from his shaving soap, that they were left gasping for air. The Gypsy had a heavy jug in her full wide bosom. Into it she would pour all the brandy and liquors the merry-makers received everywhere [they went], since they had to be wished well by everyone in the village. They also went to the neighboring villages and, oh, when they ran into another such troop outside the local village's boundaries, there would be a big fight. In such encounters sometimes somehow one of the participants may have lost his life. Whence [comes] the saying that if two White-horse riders run into each other outside the village [beyond the limits of the local village], one of them must die within the course of the next year. When the rounds [visitations to the houses] ended, of course, the participants emptied the jug at once. And then the entire merry play was discussed in detail over and over again." (Weber-Kellermann, 1978: 29).[15]

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[15] „Kann Dir heute einen Tatsachenbericht über die Weihnachtsbräche schreiben und zwar von einem älteren Mann erzählt, der selbst dabei gewesen. Hat nicht weit ab von uns im Kreise Gerdauen gewohnt.

6 Männer gehörten dazu, natürlich alle verkleidet. Als erster ein *Gendarm*, dann kam der *Schimmelreiter*, ritt auf einem Stock mit einem Pferdekopt vorne, 2 Beine mit weißem Laken behängt, 3. der *Storch* mit einem langen Schnabel, in den eine Nadel eingeklemmt war. Nro. 4 ein *Schornsteinfeger*, 5 ein *Barbier* und 6 eine *Zigeunerin*.

Der Gendarm fragte beim Betreten des Hauses, ob es gestattet sei einzutreten. Der Schimmelreiter—es mußte ein besonders flinker und geschickter Mann sein—hüpfte mit seinem provisorischen Reittier auf Tische und Bänke. Wenn der Tisch mit Tassen, Tellern und Gläsern besitzt war, gab es natürlich Scherben. Der Storch zwackte und stach mit seinem Schnabel, wen er zu fassen kriegte. Der Shornsteinfeger umfaßte und küßte mit seiner schwarzen Kluft, wer nicht flüchten konnete. Der Barbier schlug den Seifenschaum und seifte seine Opfer, daß die nur immer so nach Luft prusteten. Die Zigeunerin hatte in ihrem vollen weiten Busen eine, gewichtige Kanne. Darein goß sie die Schnäpse unk Liköre, die den Spaßmachen überall spendiert wurden, denn dieselben mußten ja alle im Dorfe beglücken. Sie zogen auch in die Nachbardörfer und wehe, wenn sie sich außer ihrer Ortsgrenzen mit einem anderen solchen Zug begegneten, dann gab's eine groß Keilerei. Dabei ist wohl irgendwie einmal ein Beteiligter zu Tode gekommen. Daher

Although over time the cast of characters that takes part in the Good Luck Visits has been reduced, in many parts of Europe the Bear and its Trainer, the White Mare and the Stork (Eagle) characters have continued to participate. On the other hand, in the western extremes of Europe, e.g., in the Pyrenees and further west in Asturias, we find performances that have up to fifteen different characters (Caro Baroja, 1965). Undoubtedly, a closer and more fine-grained examination of these carnival performances in different parts of Europe could bring into view a more complex set of actors.

Fig. 30. Main Characters from left to right: Stork, White Mare, Bear and Bear Trainer with a musician partially hidden behind the Stork. Source: 1953 Photo from Schleife/Slepo region. Archives of the Serbski Institute/Sorbisches Institute, Bautzen, Germany.

Finally, as noted elsewhere, there is a strong possibility that several of the standard characters encountered in these performances are connected to characters that appear in the Bear's Son Tale (Frank, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2015, 2019; Frank & Silva, 2012). In that narrative they appear as helpers, as Animal Guardians of the protagonist who is himself half-bear and half-human. These

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die Sage, wenn sich zwei Schimmelreiter außerhalf des Ortes begegnen, daß einer davon im Laufe des nächsten Jahres sterben muß. Wenn die Umzüge beendet waren, dan leerten die Beteilgten natürlich nicht mit einem Male die Kannen. Und wurde dann das ganze lustige Spiel noch einmal richtig durchgesprochen." Translation by Roslyn M. Frank & Eduard Selleslagh (Weber-Kellermann, 1978: 29).

magical animals allow the main character to shape-shift, taking on the abilities and physical forms of the animal in question, while they provide the protagonist with other types of help. Perhaps the most wide-spread Animal Guardian is the White or Grey Mare who also aids the main character at a strategic juncture. Another character who appears frequently is the Female Eagle Shaman who in many locations morphed into a Stork or Crane (Frank, 1997, 2007, 2021). Again, the role of the Eagle an important one. She flies the Bear's Son out of the Underworld where he is trapped. The Eagle explains that she is willing to help him because he has saved her Eaglets from the Snake. But because the journey to the Upper World will be a long one, she conditions her aid by saying that the Bear's Son will have to bring along a sack of meat to feed her along the way which he does. However, when he runs out of meat, in order to continue feeding her, he beings to carve off slices of meat from his thigh. When they finally successfully reach the Upper World. The Eagle turns and touches him, restoring her helper to full health. The motif is characteristic of the storyline encountered in many versions of the tale found across all of Europe, from the Pyrenees to Bulgaria and beyond.

8.0 Conclusions

The fact that the cast of characters is so similar across much of Europe suggests that each character or its earlier counterpart was assigned a specific role in the activities that took place during the house visits. Moreover, even though the time depth associated with these European customs is shallow, we are able to form analogies, drawing on parallels found in the ritual performances associated with the practice of bear ceremonialism in North America and Eurasia all of which aids in the interpretation of the European materials. All in all, at this juncture the material under investigation can be understood to form part of a complex ethnocultural substrate that manifests itself in slightly different ways across much of Europe.

The correspondences which begin to show up when these performances are compared and contrasted and then subjected to careful review suggest that we are looking at remnants of a much older cosmovision, linked in turn to the belief in an ursine genealogy for humans. Furthermore, whereas for centuries these traditions, beliefs and rituals have been dismissed as quaint folkloric expressions, they now can be interpreted as a means of gaining access to a conceptual framework belonging to a much older animist cosmology, more typical of a hunter-gatherer mindset. When viewed broadly and as a whole, they can be understood to represent a pan-European phenomenon, performances that share traits and encompass a similar cast of characters. Yet, the concrete manifestations are diverse, varying from one location to another, much like dialects of the same language, different yet related.

We have seen that these materials and expressive behaviors, both tangible and intangible in nature, have been passed down from one generation to the next, almost exclusively through mechanisms typical of orality. And in the process they have been modified and reshaped by the contexts in which they were interpreted, but without any overarching authority being charged with their care and maintenance. Rather they have been continuously appropriated and re-interpreted by the individual communities of practice and as a result have formed part of the shared memories

and identities of the collectives in question. Consequently, rather than representing a monolithic cultural unity, we find multiple narratives of past practices which have been negotiated, for the most part, by members of the local communities themselves. Hence, the similarities in the images, actions and discourses that surface repeatedly are best explained as emanating from this older ethnocultural substrate, grounded in the belief in bear ancestors.

This reinterpretation of the materials coincides with what seems to be a renewed interest on the part of Europeans in exploring their origins and in documenting the performances not just as folklore, but as artistic representations whose analysis warrants detailed study. In the process, efforts to document this rich legacy of performance art have been aided by the remarkable visual images produced by outstanding photographers such as Charles Fréger and Axel Hoedt. And at the same time, more and more attention has been directed to carrying out micro-level studies of these local customs, all of which have many ramifications in terms of promoting local cultural autonomy and identity. The torrent of scholarly books and articles that have appeared in recent years is further evidence of the interest that this phenomenon has for member of the general public (Corvino, 2013; Fréger, 2012; Hoedt, 2013, Meilinger, 2015; Müller & Müller, 1999; Schweiger & Zerling, 2005).

Of particular interest is the work by Martin Hallinger (2004), a three-hundred-twenty-page volume that represents the first comprehensive documentation of this advent custom in Berchtesgaden. Over a thousand illustrations are included which show the diversity of the custom, which, in practice, clearly varies somewhat in its details from one location to another. Hallinger is concerned with tracing the tradition as it has been attested in the historical record from 1601 to 2004, not with the ultimate origins of the custom. He also documents the popular groups, the Basses, that take part in organizing and performing the tradition. There are over forty of these Basses that shape the Buttnmandllauf. Hallinger's chronicles of the Basses show the similarities and differences, the enthusiasm as well as the seriousness and dedication of the performers. Humorous stories about Buttmandl running in the past and today testify to the unbroken love for this custom. In short, the book talks about the historical development of the tradition over the last century and attempts to trace its origins. The present study has been a more modest attempt to do the same while concentrating on aspects of the tradition that are related to the straw bears themselves, their production and perpetuation across time.

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